

Gwendolyn Brooks, Poet



*Be yourself. Don't imitate other poets.
You are as important as they are.*

From the time she was a little girl, Gwendolyn Brooks loved words. Her family had a bookshelf full of poetry books. Every evening, Gwendolyn's father read poetry aloud to his family. Brooks said, "Very early in life I became fascinated with the wonders language can achieve, and I began playing with words." By the time she was seven, Gwendolyn was writing her own poetry. Every day she wrote poetry in her notebooks.

When Gwendolyn was eleven she submitted four of her poems to a newspaper. She hoped that one of the poems would be published. But her poems were so amazing that all four of them were published. Two years later, her poem *Eventide* was published in a magazine. Gwendolyn's future looked bright.

But Brooks' high school years turned out to be difficult. She was quiet and didn't have many friends. Every year she went to a different high school hoping that things would be better for her, but they weren't. Even though high school was not a happy place for her, Gwendolyn found happiness in her writing. By the time she was 16 years old, she had written over 75 poems. She also met two famous Black poets, Langston

Hughes and James Weldon Johnson. Both poets encouraged Gwendolyn to keep writing her poetry.

After graduating high school, Gwendolyn Brooks went to Wilson Junior College in Chicago. She majored in literature.

After she graduated from college, Brooks began working for the NAACP, a civil rights organization. When she wasn't working, Gwendolyn continued to write poetry.

In 1945, Gwendolyn's first book of poetry was published. It was called *A Street in Bronzeville*. Her second book of poetry, *Annie Allen*, was published in 1949. This book won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. She was the first Black to be awarded this prestigious, or highly respected award. Brooks continued to have her poetry published throughout the rest of her life.

Besides writing poetry, Brooks taught others to write poetry. She taught at several universities and at Chicago Writing Workshops. She sponsored poetry contests for people who were in prison. Brooks wanted other people to enjoy writing poetry as much as she did.

Name: _____

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1. Why was high school difficult for Gwendolyn?

2. What do you think Gwendolyn Brooks meant when she said that she “began playing with words”? What are some ways people can “play with words”?

3. How did Gwendolyn Brooks positively impact her community?

4. The passage states, “She was the first Black to be awarded this prestigious, or highly respected award.” Give another example of a prestigious award that is given to people.
